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ABSTRACT

Discourse and conversational analysis methods were used in a qualitative reconstruction of one aspect of the regularities in the way 61 children "do" personal reference. Of particular interest was the development of two reference forms: minimization--preference for simple (one word) forms, or recipient design--reference forms indicating to the listener that he or she knows the person referred to. The children's reference activities were taken from the narratives of the 5-, 7-, and 10-year old subjects in both a formal and an informal situation. The detailed analysis of the conversational data revealed the following aspects of referential activities as different steps in the acquisition of preferences of reference to persons in conversation: (1) children do not use the proper name in reference to a person, although the name is provided by the listener in the conversation; (2) children indicate that they are searching for the name which is not available to them; and (3) children try to elicit the name they do not know from the listener for further use in the discourse. Additional analyses revealed that children as young as 7 had already begun to master the two reference forms. Children aged 10, however, showed a higher degree of sensitivity as to the way in which they applied the two references. (HOD)

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PERSONAL REFERENCE IN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES: DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS

Talk given at the Symposium "Psycholinguistic Strategies in Text Production", Seventh Biennial Meeting of the International Society of Behavioural Development, Munich, Aug. 3, 1983

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4. Data and Methods

Our interest in the development of personal reference in children emerged in the course of work on the development of narrative skills in natural settings. (cf. Quasthoff/Nikolaus 1982, Repp 1982). We worked with approximately 20 children in each of the following age groups: 5, 7, 10, and 14. Each age group was divided into two groups of 10 children. The first group related the incident in a conversational setting which the subjects did not perceive as being part of the experiment, whereas the second group recounted the same incident following the explicit request of the experimenter. I will refer to the first type of story telling situation as the "informal situation" and to the second type as the "formal situation".

The 10 children of each age group and situational type were recorded in different institutions such as day-care centers or schools. The children were provided with a cover story that explained our presence in the institution and the reason for the technical equipment as well as the recording that we made in the "official" part of the experiment.

For our later discussions it is important to mention that the three participants of the staged incident (see below) spent at least a day with the children before the start of the experiment, and that all the members of the research team were introduced to the children by name.

During the preparations for the experiments the children witnessed a staged incident (the same for all age groups and situational types) that they perceived as being a natural event. The "plot" ot the incident is as follows: a male student trips over the cord of a tape recorder causing it to fall off the table onto the floor. He doesn't want to tell his supervisor because he is afraid of being shouted at again. His co-worker, a female student, argues that they have to tell the supervisor or they will jeopardize the experiment. She finally decides to tell him and thus tattles from the perspecti of the male student. The supervisor, in fact, does get very angry at the student, but, in the course of the argument it turns out that not much harm has been done anyway since the tape recorder was a broken one that had been brought by mistake. While the supervisor goes to look for a new tape recorder, the male student accuses the female student of unnecessarily tattling[1].

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The moral dilemma in which the female student finds herself (you should not tattle vs. you should be honest) was of course built in in order to compare our results with research on the development of moral judgement (cf. Kohlberg 1976).

After the children had witnessed the incident, we video-taped the kind of activities that we were supposedly interested in.

In the informal situation each of the 10 children then was asked to take part in an experimental interview (the "official" part of our experiment). While the child was waiting for the experimenter to show up, he/she found him/herself waiting in a room with a person who was well known to the child, usually one of the care-takers at the day-care-center, and who was supposedly in charge of guarding the cassette recorder. If the child did not volunteer to tell about what had just happened, the listener, who of course had not witnessed the incident, was instructed to use subtle elicitation devices.

With the exception of the staged incident, the same procedure was followed on the two following days with the same children, using, of course, different kinds of "official" interviews for each of the three days. This meant that each child told about the same real world incident on three subsequent days to three different listeners who (from the child's perspective) knew nothing about the incident. As far as the child was concerned these activities did not belong to the experimental tasks, which only began when the official experimenter entered the room (after the child had told about the incident).

In the formal situation there is no "waiting room phase". Instead the experimenter immediately asks the child to tell about something that he or she has experienced and explicitly asks about "what just happened in the other room". Please note that in this, as in the other condition, the child thinks that the listener of the story has not been informed about the details of the incident.

Aside from other theoretical considerations of a sociolinguistic

interactive, or socio-cognitive nature, the following detail of the situational difference is extremely interesting in the present context: In the informal situation, when a care-taker is the interactive partner of the child, the child cannot necessarily assume that his or her listener know the protagonists of the incident by name. In the formal situation, however, the listener of the story is an experimenter, i.e. a member of the same team that the protagonists of the incident also belong to. So the child can assume that the protagonists of the story and the listener of the story know each other by name (see section 5 below).

The children's reference activities which will be studied in the following sections are taken from the narratives of our 5, 7, and 10 year old subjects in both situational conditions. 61 children were investigated (16 5 year olds, 23 7 year olds, and 20 10 year olds.

In a story which covers the entire incident we have three protagonists, i.e. possible referents: two males (Kurt and Paul), one female (Bärbel), i.e. two in the lower position in the social hierarchy (Paul and Bärbel as students), one in a higher hierarchical position (Kurt, the "boss" of the team).

The way in which these data are analyzed in the present paper is mainly qualitative. The quantitative analysis of the distribution of different references forms in different age groups, situational types and especially in connection with the level of socio-cognitive development according to Selman/Jaquette (1977) will be reported in later studies.

What is attempted in this paper is the qualitative reconstruction of one aspect of the regularities in the way in which children "do" personal reference. This reconstruction primarily uses the methods of discourse analysis and conversational analysis;

2. Minimization and recipient design as the "two preferences in the organization of reference to persons in conversation"

Sacks & Schegloff (1979) have described the methods - in the ethnomethodological sense of the word - by which adults do personal reference. According to them there are two principles which are preferably followed by conversationalists in their selection of reference forms: 1) minimization and 2) recipient design. In other words, speakers have a preference for 1) simple (one word) forms and 2) "recognitionals", i.e. reference forms which indicate to the listener that he knows (or is supposed to know) the person referred to.

In conversations about persons who are known to both participants the observation of these two principles leads to the use of the proper name as the preferred reference form. The same holds for those conversations in our data where the child's listener is either a member of the research team or a caretaker who indicates, in the course of the conversation, that s/he is personally acquainted with the participants of the incident. Sacks' & Schegloff's data show that in case of incompatibility between the two principles there is a preference for recipient design, i.e. for the use of recognitionals, but the principle of minimization is just "relaxed and not suspended".

2.1 Possible stages in the acquisition of minimized recognitionals as reference forms

If observing the preferences for minimization and recipient design results in the selection of the proper name as the reference form, the ways in which the children of our conversations deal with proper names should serve as possible indications of how well the children have acquired these two principles.

In order to examine the development of these two preferences in children, it does not seem reasonable to concentrate on

the cases in which children actually do use the proper name as a reference form. The picture one would get following this procedure would be determined very much by pure chance, i.e. if a child knows the name, he uses it, if he doesn't, he doesn't, a fact which is not particularly interesting.

A more fruitful approach is to look at what children do when they do not know the name. Does the child indicate this lack as a kind of communicative problem? Does s/he do anything to find out the name? Both cases would be an indication that the child has acquired the preference for the name, but is not in a position to use this prefered form.

These considerations, based on a very detailed analysis of conversational data, suggest the following aspects of referential activities as different "steps" in the acquisition of the "two preferences in the organization of reference to persons in conversation":

1) The child does not use the proper name in reference to a person, although the name is provided by the listener in the conversation.
2) The child indicates that s/he is searching for the name, which is not available to him or her. There are different ways in which the lack of the proper name can become apparent in interaction:
   a) As a response to questions of the kind "who did X?", the child states that the name is not available. Typically: "I don't know his (or her) name".
   b) The child uses the wrong name for the person referred to. In most cases this wrong name does not seem to be a consequence of mixing up names, e.g. Kurt for Paul or the other way round. Instead the children seem to invent names[2].
   c) The child uses a wrong name with a "try marker" (Sacks/Schegloff 1979). This particular way of indicating that the child actually is searching for the name which he or she does not know is considered to be the "highest step": The use of a wrong name with a try marker ("X or whatever

his name is") can serve very well as the triggering of a listener's move in which he provides the correct name.

3) The child tries to elicit the name which s/he does not know from the listener for further use in discourse. This elicitation can be organized in two ways, which again mark the different degrees to which the child indicates that s/he is trying to follow the two preferences for minimization and the use of recognitionals:

   a) The child declares explicitly that s/he does not know the name. Please note that this activity is different from the one under 2 a) above in which the child states not knowing the name in response to a who-question. What is meant here is a non-elicited "I-don't-know-his-name" as a substitute for the reference form[3].

   b) The child asks the listener explicitly what the name of the person referred to is and thus always initiates a side sequence (Jefferson 1972) within the conversational narrative.

I will use the next section to show how these different ways of compensating for not knowing the name, or "steps", developmentally speaking, work in conversation. At the same time I will show how different usage of these resources is distributed across age groups.

2.2 Age-specific preferences in doing personal reference

We have to turn to the syntactically surprising observation that the younger the children are the greater the proportion of complex reference forms (see Quastoff in press. In view of the gradual acquistion of the two preferences for minimization and for the use of recognitionals, this is a clear indication of how younger children solve the dilemma of an incompatibility between the two preferences. Sacks & Schegloff tell us that adults relax the principle of minimization (without suspending it) and follow the preference for recipient design. Since definite descriptions are recognitionals, 5 year old children also favor recipient design but obviously do not care about minimization.

Let us now turn to the question of how children handle the non-availability of the proper name, taken as an indication of the degree to which they acquired the two preferences for minimization and recipient design.

The clearest indication for someone not making any attempt to follow the "two preferences" is a <u>speaker who is provided with the name by his listener and still does not use it</u> (1). This happens in some conversations with kindergarteners, although typically even the 5 year olds improve referential accuracy by using the more adequate forms introduced by the listener. But notice how 5 year old Manuel really does not seem to be interested in the name offered to him for easier reference:

(1)

```
 99 U : [L] das war der hatteter so rosa Hosen an?
100 M : [schmatzt] ja der /hat/[Stuhl wird geschoben] und
101         hier eine Hánd -
102 U : ach dà ne Hánd
103     ja der hat eine Hand aufgenäht
104     auf diesn [L] auf diesn - Hósn - diesen Óverall ne
105     hat hat so so Hósen gehabt die so hóch gehen hier
106     eh heh
107     [L] ja des is der Pául -
                                        (05-025-31)
```

```
(M = child, U = listener)
 99 U : [L] that was the guy did=e have sorta pinkish
                                          pants on?
100 M : (smacks his lips] yeah he /had/[chair is moved] and
101         here a hánd
102 U : oh a hánd there
103     uh-huh he had a cut-out of a hand sewn
104     on his [L] on his - pánts - his óveralls didn't he?
105     had had the kinda pants that um come up to hére -
106     uh-huh
107     [L] yeah that's Paúl -
```

This explicit introduction of the name Paul by the listener on the second day did not make the referential work for Manuel easier on the third day: the way he refers to Paul again is so "energy-consuming" that this listener also offers Paul's name for further use:

(1 b)

```
 7 M : da? - da hat=der dér mit der Hánd hier - gehabt
 8         hat so ne lila - rosene Hóse
 9      [L] der hat [schluckt] -
10    ┌  der wollte
11 I  └: der rosa Hose
12 M : der /r/osane ["r" gerollt]
13 I : ách das war der Pául -
                                    (05-032-31)
```

(I = listener)

```
 7 M : there? - he had the one the one that had the hand -
                                                      here
 8         had kind of purplish - pinkish pants on
 9      [L] he had [swallows]
10    ┌  he was going to
11 I  └: the pink pants
12 M : the /p/inkish ["p" emphasized]
13 I : óh that was Pául -
```

Although this is the second time that Manuel is offered the easiest reference form for Paul, which, at the same time, follows the preferences for minimization and recipient design, he does not once refer to Paul by name. This referential behavior indicates very strongly that Manuel has not yet acquired the preference for minimization. This holds even though Manuel finally does make use of the name Kurt offered to him by his two previous listeners.

The use of a wrong name for a person (2b) can be seen as a further step in the acquisition of the "two preferences" if the invention of a name is the reaction to the referential need for a name the child cannot compensate for using other methods. The reason for the use of this method may be that the child has not yet mastered other resources of compensating for not knowing a name, or that another method that the child had tried out did not work. Fragment (18) below gives an example fo the latter case:

(2)

30 D : [L] also da is (de)n ein Männ un
31 kenn=isch den Na:m nich mehr
32 [L] also hat der is der über über also so ne
33 Schnür vom Kassettenrekorder gel_ äh so gestólper

```
34 D : und der Kass_
35 V : ja?
36 D : Kassettenrekorder is runtergefallen [L]
37     und da war die Bärbel
→38    und und hat=es den - Günther gepétzt -
39 V : /mhm/[phatisch]
40 D : un un der Günther hat dann mit de:n - äm - isch
41        glaube [L] ja hä (is ja egal) -
42 V :                    der hast gepetzt?
43 D : j_ - ja hat ein Kin das ge_
→44    also [L] Bärbel hat Günther das /gepetz/[Tür geht au
45     daß [L] ähm /de/r [L] daß
46 ? :        un Tag
47 V :             guten Tag
48 D : daß der Kassettenrekorder runtergefallen is
→49    un da hat der [L] Günther mit den also geschimpft/
50        [eine Person geht durch den Raum]
51 V : aha
52 D : un da h=hatter sich aufgeregt
→53    und un na hat der Günther gesagt
54     der /is ja sowieso/[leicht gelispelt] schon futsch [I
55     und un - und dann /ha r gesach/[sehr schenll, kontra-
→56       hier] - hat der - äm Péter gesacht
→57    odder wie der héißt da
                                    (10-013-41)

(D = child, V = listener)
30 D : [L] er then there is (th_) a man an'
31     can't remember his name
32     [L] er he had he er uhm tripped over over
33     er uh the córd of the cassette recorder
34     and the cass_
35 V : he did?
36 D : cassette recorder fell down
37     and then Bärbel was there
→38    and and tóld on him to - Günther -
39 V : uh-huh
```

40 D : an an then Günther (got mad) at um: - um - I:
41 think [L] yeah (doesn't matter) -
42 V : he tattled?
43 D : y_ - yeah a kid told hi_
→44 er [L] Bärbel tattled it to /Günther/[door opens]
45 that [L] uh /he: [L] that
46 ? : morn
47 V : good morning
48 D : that the cassette recorder fell down
→49 an then that [L] Günther got mad at him/[someone
50 walks through the room]
51 V : uh-huh
52 D : an then h-he got pissed off
→53 and an um Günther said
54 /it=was already broken/[lisps slightly] anyway [L]
55 and an - and /then='e sai_/[very quickly, words
→56 contracted) - he sai_ - um Péter said
→57 or whatever his name is

10 year old Dietrich at first tries to elicit Paul's name (line 31), but his listener fails to cooperate. This is somewhat astonishing since his listener is a member of the research team and thus can be assumed by the child to know the names of the participants in the incident. The next referential task for Dietrich is unproblematic since he obviously has Bärbel's name in his repertoire (line 37). When he has to refer to Kurt, however, he is again in trouble. Since his previous attempt to elicit the name from the listener did not work, he solves the problem somewhat radically by inventing the incorrect name, Günther (lines 38 etc.).

Of course, there is the slight chance that Dietrich really picked up the incorrect name, Günther, and does not primarily use it as a conversational strategy. But this possibility seems highly unlikely. There is no Günther on our research team so that a name mix-up must be ruled out. No other child in the same group used the name Günther so that we can safely assume that this incorrect reference form has not been

established among the children for some reason or other.

However, the main argument in favor of Dietrich's invention of proper names as a compensatory device is the following: In lines 56, 57 Dietrich introduces a wrong name with a try marker (2c) in reference to Paul, i.e. the same referent for whom he had unsuccessfully tried to elicit the right name in line 31. This parallel naming problem and the fact that the wrong name was not used immediately, strongly indicate that the elicitation of a name by reference to its being unavailable (3b) (line 31), the use of an invented name with a try marker (3a) (56, 57), and the invention of a name without a try marker (2b) (38 etc.) are all methods used to compensate for not knowing a name in conversation.

Of course, these methods differ in the degree of explicitness with which the listener is asked to share in the referential work of establishing the name: The simple use of a wrong name without a try marker (2b) may pass for an unproblematic referential act if the listener does not recognize the incorrect name.

The use of an incorrect name with a try marker (3a) indicates in any case that there is some referential trouble, i.e. that the listener is supposed to help if he is in a position to do so. In other words, in comparison to the compensatory methods discussed so far, this "step" is the first one which attempts to activate the listener, albeit indirectly, to provide the name.

This special character is also stressed by the fact that we find this method only among 7 and 10 year old children. Kindergarteners do use incorrect names, but without any try markers.

The a man can't remember his name that Dietrich uses in line 30/31 is a much more explicit form of eliciting the name from the listener (3b). If the listener still withholds the name, the speaker has good reason to assume that the listener does not know it himself.

The most direct way of eliciting the name needed for an unproblematic reference (according the two preferences of minimization and recipient design) is, of course, asking the listener (3c). A question as part of an adjacency pair (Sacks/Schegloff 1973) leaves the listener with only one of two alternatives. He either has to provide the name or state that he does not know it himself. Consequently an attempt to elicit the name by asking the listener always initiates a side-sequence (Jefferson 1972). In other words, it interrupts the course of the narrative discourse unit and thus presents a relatively complicated conversational structure.

A typical example of this kind of side-sequence is found in fragment ([3]) below:

(3)
(I = Kind, V = Zuhörer)

```
110 I : ja ehm - da is n - Kasséttenrekorder rùntergeflo:gn
111 V :                                              /was?/
112        [ungläubig]
113 I : ja - und da hat denn der Junge mit de:m [überlegt
114        wie heißt der der?                          kurz]
115 V : Paul heißt der
116 I : nja der Paúl mein=ich [L]
117     /der hat der hat n Kassett - den Kasséttenrekorder
118        rùntergeschmissn/[schnell, etwas aufgeregt]
```

(10-121-48)

(I = child, V = listener)

```
110 I : yeah um - this uh - cassétte recorder flèw off
111 V :                                    /what?/ [in-
112        credulous]
113 I : yeah - and then that kid with the: [thinks a moment]
114        what's his name?
115 V : his name's Paul
116 I : yea right Paúl thats=who=I mean [L]
117     /he knócked down the uh casse_ - the ca-sétte
118        recorder/[quickly, excitedly]
```

The course of the narrative has been clearly interrupted - in this case evenin the middle of a sentence (line 113/ 114) - with the question initiating a typical side-sequence:

A: request for the name (line 114)
B: providing the name (line 115)
A: repetition of the name (line 116)
A: resumption of the narraitve (line 117)

As was mentioned above, there is a clear distribution across age groups of the different methods dealing with the conversational lack of a name and thus of the different "steps" in the acquisition of the "two preferences".

Children in the youngest group do not use indirect or direct elicitation techniques. In connection with our findings concerning the development of referential accuracy over the three days (section 4 above), please note that the child's successful elicitation of the correct name from the listener of course enables him to achieve a higher degree of referential adequacy. Since the older child takes active measures to obtain the adequate form and thus is not dependent on his listener's volunteering the information, he "automatically" increases his chances of improving his referential accuracy. As has already been pointed out, the 5 year child who does not actively elicit the reference forms needed can only use whatever happens to be offered to him/her.

When one looks at the distribution of the two direct methods for eliciting the name (3b and 3c) among children of the midd and the oldest age groups there is a surprising finding: 11 of the 23 seven year-olds, but only 9 of the 20 ten year-olds make use of these elicitation techniques. As it stands, this distribution does not confirm the hypothesis of a developmental quality behind these different techniques, in which case one would have to assume that the older children make use of the "higher step" elicitation methods to

a much higher degree than the younger children.

One explanation for this surprising quantitative finding could be very trivial. It could be that the 10 year-olds simply know the right names of the referents more often than the 7 year-olds, so that they do not have to use any elicitation techniques in order to be provided with the name. An investigation of the data under this aspect shows, however, that this is not the case.

In order to find out what happens here, we have to look closer into what the children do in response to which interactive setting. It turns out that the 7 year-olds use these elicitation techniques no matter who they are talking to. Remember that in some of the conversations in our data a teacher's aid of the school in which the children were recorded served as the listener, whereas in other conversations, a member of our research team served as the listener. As has already been pointed out, in the case of a team member the child can assume that his/her listener knows the names of the other team members so that elicitation techniques on the part of the child are perfectly sensible. There is a justification for this assumption, by the way, in that the listeners very often provide the names themselves even when not asked to do so. On the other hand, the child knows that the teachers's aids are not as closely associated with the research team, so that the assumption that this kind of listener will be able to provide the name is less likely.

It turns out that 7 year-olds use these elicitation techniques equally often in interaction with both types of listeners, whereas the 10 year-olds react clearly to this situationl variation. There are only two 10 year old children who use these elicitation techniques in interaction with a teacher's aid.

In other words, children as young as seven have already begun to master the two preferences by which adults orga-

nize their reference to persons. Children aged 10, however, show a higher degree of sensitivity as to the way in which they locally apply these two preferences of minimization and recipient design.

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Notes

[1] The incident was designed to be relatively complex because we wanted it to reflect differences in the information processing capacity among the different age groups. In fact, pretests showed that 5-year-olds very often did not process the detail that the tape recorder was already broken before it fell.

[2] Remember that the three actants of our incident spent at least a day with the children before the recording started, and were also formally introduced by name on the first day of the recordings.

[3] In this context it is comparable to the English "What's his name".

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